
Homily

"Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?"

During our staff meeting this past Tuesday the question was raised, "What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?" Various answers given, some quite creative, but my favorite response was given by Mary Hunter, our Director of Children's Ministries. She said, "Knowledge is when you know that a tomato is a fruit, and wisdom is when you know that you don't put tomato in your fruit salad."

Wisdom, personified in our lesson from Proverbs calls out to every living person to come to her for understanding. She has been with God since the beginning of creation. She parallels Jesus, the Word, who we know from John's Gospel, was also with God at the creation. Wisdom is the "Spirit of Truth" promised by Jesus in our gospel readings for the last several weeks; the One who is sent in Jesus' absence to be God's abiding presence with us.

In a world of increasing religious pluralism and competing religious voices with the rise of anti-religious thinkers and writers such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, we have reason to heed Wisdom's call to search for truth. But truth is not always found in quantifiable, scientific fact. Sometimes truth is found in the intuitive and mysterious realm of faith.

Today is the feast day of the Holy Trinity or Trinity Sunday. As you may remember this feast is the only one in the church's calendar that is associated with a doctrine. It is a day when we reflect on a teaching of the church, rather than on a teaching of Jesus. Preaching on a doctrine as complicated as the Trinity is no easy task - and accepting the concept of the Trinity requires us to exercise a good bit of faith. But the Trinity is fundamental to the church's identity and central to its proclamation. We begin most of our liturgies with acclamations of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We baptize in the name of the Trinity, we bless and send forth in the name of the Triune God. We proclaim to the world God's work as creator, redeemer and abiding, sanctifying presence. And we offer our prayers in the name of the Father, through the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. It is like the scriptural teaching that God is Love. And we know that love whether from God or the love we receive from our spouse, or children, or parents or other loved ones is not something that we can verify. We cannot prove it scientifically, we can only know it to be true as we experience it our lives.

It is often assumed that doctrines are formulated in ivory towers by theologians and ecclesiastical authorities and sometimes that is true. Once promulgated, they move down from church councils, to bishops and religious leaders, and finally they are taught to the laity. But this is not the case with the Trinity. In the earliest days of the church, her members experienced and recognized God as being in different relationships with creation, in ways that reminded them of different persons. They saw the beauty of creation and an awareness of their own existence causing them to believe in a Divine Creator. Forgiveness and reconciliation, particularly experienced in the life of Jesus, taught them to believe in a personal Redeemer. Their perception of an inner spiritual presence in their lives reminded them of Jesus' life and teachings, enabling them to serve the world in his name and showed them that God continues to be with them. They experienced God as functioning as creator, redeemer and continuing presence.

However, their biblical understanding of God did not allow for there to be three gods. The strict monotheism of the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that there is only One God. So they created their own language to describe their experience, leaving us the legacy of naming God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God who makes himself manifest in three distinct yet inter-related persons.

The reading we heard from John's gospel infers, rather than postulates a theory of Trinitarian dogma. Jesus says, "All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you." In this statement we discover a relationship of pure mutuality between the three persons of the trinity. There is no selfishness, no grasping for power by one person over the other, no desire to be greater in rank - each person exercises their function in complete agreement with the other two. All they do in creating and redeeming and abiding they do out of love; love for each other and love for the creation.

The promised Spirit of Truth helps us to understand this mystery of divine relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - but the Spirit also acts as our guide, leading us to emulate their love in the way we live our lives. God's love is mysterious and at times almost incomprehensible. It is a kind of love that is antithetical to our human nature. For humankind is by and large selfish, grasping for power and glory and exalted rank among the rest of the human family. Knowledge gives us an understanding of the ontological reality of the Trinity; but it takes wisdom for us to learn how to live into and incarnate God's love in our lives day by day. When Jesus calls the Spirit our Guide he uses a word that literally means to lead the way. The spirit leads the way for those early Christians to find the language to name their experience of the Trinity. And the Spirit still leads the way for us to experience and to name God in our generation.

In his book *Wishful Thinking*, Frederick Buechner describes the persons of the Trinity as mystery beyond us, mystery among us, and mystery within us. But it is not a mystery that is completely other-worldly and concerned with only heavenly matters. Buechner contends that this mystery is concerned with the down to earth work that God wants to do among us. Jesus brings the love of the Father to us by living among us - bringing the divine into the ordinariness of everyday existence. Jesus shows the love of the Father by eating with social outcasts and sinners - reaching out to the least and the little and the lost. He forgives with love and tenderness, reconciling the estranged. He lowers himself to death in order to teach his followers that giving away ones life can bring new life to others. Jesus' love is practical and speaks directly to the brokenness of the human predicament. In baptism we are incorporated into a community that at its best emulates the loving relationship shown to us in the Trinity. In the church we learn to love and support one another as we are formed into the image of Christ. The Holy Spirit which we receive in baptism empowers us to offer ourselves in love to the world as Jesus did; bringing creative and redeeming love to the places where we live and move and have our being,

The question Wisdom extends to us both individually and corporately is, "Will we follow the leading of the Spirit to bring reconciliation to a world desperately in need of love and redemption?" Will we forego our own needs and emulate Jesus by embracing those who look and think and act like us, but more importantly by embracing those who do not look or think or act like us. To bring wholeness to others means learning to be like the Father, creating out of our resources places where love is experienced, where life is affirmed, and where peace reigns even in the hostile environments of human existence. We begin to know Wisdom by believing that God is a Trinity of persons; mutually relating and loving each other. We live into wisdom by letting the Spirit lead us in working alongside the Trinity to usher in the Shalom of God which brings peace and wholeness to the world. Lady Wisdom and the Spirit are calling, will we be wise and respond to their call and gain understanding? AMEN.